

PRISM: A Journal of Regional Engagement

Volume 3 | Issue 2

Article 2

December 2014

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Recommended Citation

Rattigan-Rohr, J., He, Y., & Murphy, M. (2014), 99-118. Learning from Struggling Readers: The Impact of a Community-based Service Learning Project on Teacher Preparation. *PRISM: A Journal of Regional Engagement*, 3 (2). Retrieved from <https://encompass.eku.edu/prism/vol3/iss2/2>

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Learning from Struggling Readers: The Impact of a Community-based Service Learning Project on Teacher Preparation

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With the growing number of diverse struggling readers in K-12 settings in the United States, it is critical to provide opportunities for students to enhance reading skills beyond classroom settings, for families to be involved in reading education, and for teachers to be better prepared to work with both students and their families. In this study, we described a community-based service learning project, the Village Project, that highlights the collaboration among the university, schools, and local community partners. Through a reciprocal learning process, not only did struggling readers and families benefited from the program, preservice teacher candidates involved in the project also enhanced their understandings of reading instruction and family involvement. Following up with 20 teacher candidates who participated in the project during 2009-2012, we explored the long-term impact of the Village Project on their development as teachers, and provided discussions and implications for teacher education.

Keywords: Preservice teachers, Service learning, Family involvement, Teacher education

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), in the United States fewer than 40% of fourth graders read at or above proficiency level based on state standardized tests. The increasing linguistic and cultural diversity among K-12 students further challenges teachers to differentiate their classroom instruction and to provide support for all learners. This high percentage of diverse struggling readers calls for schools to provide instructional support for students beyond traditional classroom settings (Mokhtari, Hutchison, & Edwards, 2010), and urges teacher educators to better prepare both preservice and inservice teachers to work with not only struggling readers, but their families as well (Adunyarittigun, 1997; Fan, 2001).

Connecting teacher learning with the local community through community-based service learning projects is the ideal collaborative opportunity for teacher educators, preservice and inservice teachers, and local community partners (Rohr, 2009). Thus, to address the learning needs of struggling readers and to leverage local resources to create a learning environment for both students and teachers, a community-based tutoring project entitled “It Takes a Village” (or the Village Project) was initiated in 2008. The Village Project connects a local university, community partners, parents, preservice teachers and students through afterschool tutoring activities. As with most service learning programs, there is a reciprocal relationship among the participants. The university, preservice teachers, inservice teachers and parents work to meet the needs of the many struggling students in the project. At the same time, the project prepares preservice teachers to work in public

spaces with struggling readers and their parents. In doing so, preservice teachers learn to diagnose students' reading needs and to include parents in their efforts to improve students' reading skills. In addition, preservice teachers are provided with opportunities to learn from parents, to communicate with parents, and to involve them in shaping educational activities for their children (Rattigan-Rohr, 2012).

While many researchers have documented the success of such community-based service-learning projects on student learning and preservice teacher development (Boyle-Base, 1998; Couse & Russo, 2006), very few followed up with the preservice teachers beyond the teacher education program to examine the long-term impact of these projects. We know little about the potential impact of such projects on preservice teachers after they become inservice teachers and take on more responsibilities and leadership roles in their own teaching practices. Further understanding of this long-term impact would not only assist teacher educators in reflecting on and enhancing the quality of community-based service learning projects, but also allow teacher educators to provide continued support for inservice teachers to continue their professional development.

In this study, we followed up with 20 former preservice teachers who participated in the Village Project from 2009-2012 and reported what they told us about the long-term impact of the project on their growth as teachers. The findings of this study provide a better understanding of what our former students view as the long-term impact of the Village Project. Further, the findings offer insights into the difficulties teachers sometimes face when they try to apply service-learning practices into classroom settings.

Literature Review

Service Learning in Teacher Education

Field experience is an essential component of teacher education programs. It can be designed as a service-learning experience where teacher educators are intentional in connecting the teacher education course directly with community service (Lane, Hudson, McCray, Tragash, & Zeig, 2011; Prentice & Garcia, 2000; Quinn, 2006). Research has indicated that service learning experiences not only enhance students' understanding and application of academic content, but also their commitment to diversity, social justice, and advocacy (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Simons & Cleary, 2006). In teacher education, community-based service learning experiences are especially important, because these opportunities allow teacher candidates to interact with community partners and uncover the funds of knowledge and cultural wealth teachers can leverage to promote students' academic success (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Yosso, 2005).

Literacy tutoring projects have been widely integrated into teacher education programs as a type of service learning experience, especially in preparing elementary education teachers or reading specialists (Jensen & Tuten, 2007; Kelley, Hart, & King, 2007; Lane, et al., 2011; Spear-Swerling, 2009; Warren-Kring & Rutledge, 2011; Wasserman, 2009). Teacher candidates are typically required to work with students on reading activities, applying what they have learned regarding the main components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension (Rattigan-Rohr, 2012). The findings of studies examining the impact of such projects indicated that teacher candidates gained more content knowledge (Hart & King, 2007; Kirtman, 2008; Spear-Swerling, 2009), a better understanding of the students, families and the teaching

profession (Assaf & Lopez, 2012; Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Lane, et al., 2011; Lee & Statham, 2010; Massey & Lewis, 2011), and enhanced self-efficacy as teachers (Hart & King, 2007; Richards, 2007; Wasserman, 2009). Data from reading assessments with tutees also indicated that K-12 students participating in these tutoring projects demonstrated growth in aspects of their reading achievement (Eppler, Ironsmith, Dingle, & Errickson, 2011; Spear-Swerling, 2009). Most of these studies recognize that families and communities are important components that impact students' reading achievement and it is important for teacher candidates to make connections with students' families in tutoring. However, very few tutoring programs described in these studies included any required parental involvement (Freeman & Knopf, 2007; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Richards, 2007; Tilley-Lubbs, 2011).

Family and Community Involvement

Studies have shown that when there is intentional family-child interaction with academic tasks, there is significant improvement in the academic performance of students labeled as low-performing (Bailey, 2001; Bailey, Silvern, Brabham, & Ross, 2004). While there is a positive correlation between family involvement and student academic achievement (Adunyarittigun, 1997; Fan, 2001), too often families of students who struggle in school are not included as a means of supporting the understanding of their children's academic tasks (Epstein, 2001). However, families generally want to be involved in their struggling readers' academic efforts, but often are not sure about the best way to go about doing so (Darling & Westberg, 2004). The need to include families of struggling children in their academic tasks could not be more crucial because we know that students' attitudes about school and schooling, their ideas about the role of the teacher, and their understanding about the need for an education and the benefits thereof, often begin with the outlook and views about education expressed in the home by family members (Price, Mayfield, McFadden, & Marsh, 2001). In the theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, Epstein (1986) offers that when schools create frequent and high-quality interactions with families and communities, students are more likely to believe in the importance of schoolwork, of community and of shared responsibilities in the family. Epstein (1995) further posits that the three overlapping spheres of school, family and community should locate the student at the center of the model. The end result of such a partnership will be to motivate students to be intimately involved in working toward their own successes (Epstein, 1995). It follows, then, that for the creation of such activities to occur, there must be the involvement of adults from the school, the family and the community. Numerous research studies (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Lee, 1995; Epstein & Sanders, 2000) provide us with evidence that these types of partnerships can, in fact, be intentionally constructed and that they often include various families, many of whom are not generally inclined to become involved on their own. Therefore, in the project described in this study, family involvement was integrated as an additional required component to the traditional tutoring project that was part of the teacher education coursework. Instead of hosting the tutoring project in school settings, a public library became an essential partner in the project and offered not only space for tutoring, but also a broad range of services free of cost to students, parents, and teachers (Rattigan-Rohr, 2012).

Feeling welcomed, especially in socially connected spaces, appears to be important in student learning because this type of belongingness seems to have a positive effect upon achievement outcomes. According to Walton and Cohen (2007), motivation is "a sense

of social connectedness [that] predicts favorable outcomes” (p. 87). Walton and Cohen (2007) further posit that a sense of belonging, especially as it relates to people or groups with which one identifies, is an especially strong achievement motivator. Walton and Cohen’s (2007) ideas lead one to conclude that the children in this service learning tutoring project might feel the need to persist at the tutoring tasks because those tasks appear to be important to their family members who week after week make the trek to the tutoring site to work closely with them. Another relevant aspect of Walton and Cohen’s motivation research has to do with the idea of the “collective” and the importance of the group. Thus, the Village Project, which meets as a group in the library at the same time each week and in a communal environment of parents, tutors and children working toward the same goal, might, in and of itself, be motivating. Belonging, then, in such a social setting might be beneficial for the motivation of all the students. The tutees are, after all, aware of the fact that they are attending the Village with their parents for one purpose -- to improve their reading skills. Thus, the act of undertaking the tutoring task together with family members and other students, some of whom are friends, may spur them to keep trying or to persist in their tutoring tasks, creating the notion that we are all in this together, so to speak.

In order to design and integrate community-based service learning opportunities to better prepare all teacher candidates, not only in reading instruction but also community-engaged practices, it is important that we explore both the immediate outcomes on preservice teachers and the possible long-term impact of the project (Hart & King, 2007). Therefore, in this study we followed up with former teacher candidates from the Village Project to examine the impact of the project on their current practices of reading instruction and family involvement.

Project Context

The Village Project is now in its sixth year of operation, and over that time it has served more than 500 families. The project reflects an ongoing partnership that developed between a university and the surrounding community. Epstein’s (1995) theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence underpins the development of the Village Project. According to Epstein (1995), these spheres include: the school sphere, the family sphere, and the community sphere. For the Village Project, the school sphere is comprised of the School of Education and an after-school tutoring program in the same community. As expected, the family sphere included the tutees’ families and the community sphere consisted of a local library.

The project began as an extension of a service learning reading methods course at a private higher education institution in the Southeastern United States. The course was designed in two overlapping phases. Phase I covered reading theory, during which preservice teachers learned to conduct reading assessments and how to teach the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension and fluency. Phase II drew upon the knowledge they gained from the first phase to tutor one-on-one a struggling reader while incorporating the reader’s parent(s) into the tutoring activities. Parental commitment to participate in the Village Project was a requirement for student participation. The inclusion of parents in the tutoring allowed for the development of reciprocal relationships in which preservice teachers gained knowledge from parents about tutees’ reading habits, preferences, skill level, or any other thoughts parents would like to share. Parents, on the other hand, gained insights from the preservice teachers about

how they might help their children at home. Struggling students enjoyed having their parents with them and parents, in addition to supporting their children, also made use of the community resources available to them.

The tutoring sessions were held each semester over a seven-week period for two hours each week. The reason for including the library was to allow the children to have access to a wide variety of reading materials they did not necessarily have to purchase. Additionally, children would have opportunities to re-read for clarity and fluency as they practiced at home with the same books they used in the tutoring sessions. Parents were invited to take a tour of the library, to visit, and to join the library with their children. Parents and students were encouraged to check out library books covering topics in which the students had interest (Rattigan-Rohr, 2012). It should be noted here that tutees' reading levels and area of need are generally derived from a Qualitative Reading Inventory pretest conducted by preservice teachers. However, there are times when reading needs are determined from benchmark data provided by the tutee's parent via their classroom reading teacher.

Tutoring was conducted using the Plan, Action, Result, and Tutoring (PART) model (see Appendix A). This model was developed for the course with the idea of actively including parents in the tutoring process. We noticed in previous semesters that parents were often observers to the tutoring process rather than being actual participants with their children. As a result the tutoring process was refined to include the PART model, with the central aim of encouraging preservice teachers to think explicitly about parents as participants with their children rather than simply observers of the tutoring process. The notion of placing parents and their children at the center of the actual tutoring session is based on the research evidence that when there is intentional family-child interaction with academic tasks, we begin to see significant improvement in the academic performance of students labeled as low-performing (Bailey, 2004; Bailey et al., 2004).

With this in mind, the PART model allowed preservice teachers to create a plan of action for the tutoring session in which they outlined each participant's involvement in the sessions. Within the plan, preservice teachers determined what the group or triad (tutor/tutee/parent) would do during each session. For the first "action" which occurred at the start of each tutoring session, preservice teachers chose an activity that the triad could do together. This was similar to a warm-up exercise in which the tutor introduced the activity for the day, and the parent, tutee, and tutor would each give his/her view about the upcoming strategy or activity. We found that tutees and parents really enjoyed this opening, as there was generally a great deal of congenial bantering that took place during the "first action" phase of the tutoring session.

Nonetheless, since the tutoring activity was meant for the benefit of the tutee he or she had to act on his or her own without the help of either the tutor or the parent. Therefore, the preservice teacher not only planned for that opportunity but also planned to respond to the tutee and to continually bring the parent back into the activity as a key participant in the tutoring process. Additionally, preservice teachers also created in their plans a place for parents to continue the tutoring at home (Rattigan-Rohr, 2012). This type of active planning encourages preservice teachers to plan carefully for each tutoring session with his/her student and parent. It also creates a space for tutors to develop on-the-spot decision making ability, a skill we believe is key for an effective teacher. This happens because tutors are forced to listen carefully to the tutees and watch closely to see what the tutees are doing. Tutors must ask themselves, "are my tutees understanding the information we

are covering and are they able to utilize that information in some way?" The tutor then must make an on-the-spot decision either to enhance the lesson or to return to the plan, perhaps with more clarity. We believe this type of on-the-spot decision making during the tutoring activity also assures parents that they, too, can make these kinds of decisions to either enhance, clarify or re-teach when they are working at home with their children (see Appendix B for a sample lesson plan).

The students and parents in the projects are predominately Hispanic (68%), while 34% are African-American and 8% are Caucasian. The Village Project aims at enhancing struggling readers' reading achievement and motivation through one-to-one tutoring. The project began in fall 2008 with 16 students and their families. The following spring semester saw 25 families. The current project serves 94 students and their families. Students were originally recruited into the project through a letter we sent to our Title I partners inviting parents and struggling readers to join us for free tutoring, if parents would attend, and if they were willing to continue working with their children at home. Over time, however, parents began telling other parents about the project and now we keep an ongoing waiting list of parents who are interested in participating in the project with their children. We believe the most unique feature of the Village Project is its parent involvement requirement. It should also be noted that our understanding of "parental involvement" is broad. Though most of the parents in our project are mothers or fathers of the tutees, we also have several grandparents, aunts and even older siblings accompanying tutees.

Methods

During preservice teachers' tenure in the Village Project we are constantly observing teaching and encouraging reflection within the parameters of the course. However, we do not know the impact of the service-learning course on our preservice teachers after they have left us. Hence our desire to uncover what, if any, patterns of behaviors learned during the course have become habits of mind in ways that would promote similar behaviors in our service learning students' future work experiences. With this in mind, we wanted to hear more than the occasional anecdotal feedback our graduates were telling us about the Village Project and their work in it. Additionally, we wanted to assess whether or not our former students believed the project has any long-term impact. That is, do students believe the service-learning course was a worthwhile exercise for both the short and long term?

Because the foci of the Village Project include reading instruction with struggling readers and family involvement, we were particularly interested in examining what former students were saying about the long-term impact of the project on their teacher-perceptions and practices in terms of reading instruction and family involvement. Our research questions were: a) Do former Village tutors continue to involve parents in their practice as classroom teachers? b) Do former Village tutors continue to employ reading instruction techniques learned in the service learning course? Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a survey sent out to teacher candidates who had participated in the Village Project and graduated from the teacher education program (see Appendix C). The survey contained 14 Likert-scale items asking participants to rate their confidence level in integrating various reading components as they work with struggling readers (five items), and their perception of family involvement (nine items). In addition, six open-ended questions were included to allow participants to share the impact of the Village Project on ways they build learning community, collaborate with others, and integrate Village type

activities at their schools. Demographic information regarding participants' school context was also collected. The reliability of the instrument (Cronbach's alpha) is .88.

Participants in this study were selected from a list of graduates provided by the Director of Outreach in the school of education. This is from a list of students who chose to inform the institution about their current employment and location after graduation. Among the 136 students on the list, 31 had participated in the Village Project service-learning course. An electronic copy of the survey was sent to the email address provided by these graduates. Three emails were returned as "undeliverable", so we assumed the remaining 28 graduates received the survey.

Twenty participants (71%) responded to the survey and provided us with insights on what they believed was the long-term impact of the Village Project. Among all respondents, there were three graduates from 2009 (15%), three from 2010 (15%), five from 2011 (25%), and nine from 2012 (45%). All but one respondent reported that they were currently teaching (95%). A majority of the candidates described the schools they were teaching in as suburban (60%), public (55%), and half of the respondents were teaching in Title I schools (50%). Three respondents were teaching in small private schools (15%).

The survey data were imported and analyzed in SPSS and ATLAS.ti. Descriptive statistics were reported based on the quantitative data to capture the impact of the program on participants' confidence in reading instruction and their perceptions regarding family involvement. Themes and patterns from the open-ended questions were also analyzed to corroborate the quantitative findings.

Findings

Based on the survey findings, we described participants' self-reported confidence in reading instruction and their perceptions of family involvement. While we cannot establish the impact of the Village Project directly through participants' responses, the findings allowed us to identify components in the Village Project that may have an impact on teacher candidates' development and shed light on ways we can further strengthen the Village Project.

Reading Instruction

One of the major purposes of the Village Project was to enhance participants' confidence in working with struggling readers. In the survey, therefore, we followed up with the graduates and asked them to rate their confidence level in teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension with struggling readers. A majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident in teaching phonemic awareness (70%). All but two participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident in teaching phonics (90%), and all but one participant agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident in teaching vocabulary (95%). All participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were confident in teaching fluency and comprehension when they work with struggling readers (100%).

In order to capture participants' perceptions of the impact of the Village Project on their current reading instruction, we also asked an open-ended question directly about such impact. The analysis of their responses revealed the impact of two key elements of the Village Project: a) the application of teaching strategies with struggling readers in one-on-one settings; and b) the use of diagnostic tools to differentiate their instruction in reading.

Reflecting on how they believed the Village Project impacted their reading instruction

practices, all participants highlighted the value of the application of teaching strategies through their work with struggling readers. For example, one participant commented, “The Village provided best practices for teaching struggling readers. Not only did I learn and read about strategies, but I was able to be observed applying those skills and get feedback.” Similarly, another participant stated that: “The Village Project was the first time I was able to independently decide the teaching strategies I would use to help a struggling reader.” Some participants specifically commented on the benefit of learning to teach reading in one-on-one tutoring settings. For example, one participant said:

It makes me more aware of the needs of all struggling readers, as well as gives me a chance to see how different strategies work for different students. The program helps me with one-on-one instruction and shows the power of having time to work with students on their tailored needs. It has helped my intervention process for students who are in the various tiers of RTI.

Another participant also shared how the Village Project offered supplementary field experiences to traditional internships:

It [the Village Project] gave me the valuable experience of working one-on-one with struggling students. While my internships provided me with plenty of practice with whole-group instruction, small-group instruction was not as frequent. The Village project required me to tailor my lesson to individual students’ needs. This practice helped me to be more effective in my small group instruction in my own classroom.

Almost all the participants commented on how their current instructional practices were influenced by what they learned from the Village Project. One participant working with struggling readers in her current teaching setting commented, “The Village Project allowed me to apply what I was learning about reading instruction in class. I definitely have struggling readers in my classroom today who are benefiting from what I learned by participating in The Village Project.” Beyond working with struggling readers, another participant stated:

The “Village” project has helped me to improve my reading instruction practices. Now that I have graduated and am teaching, it allows me to work with a variety of different students. It helps me expand my thinking to recognize what helps my particular student.

In addition, a majority of the participants also commented on the use of various assessment tools to design differentiated instruction based on students’ needs in the Village Project as a major impact on their reading instruction. One participant, for example, commented on this impact:

The “Village” project impacts my reading instruction in a few ways. I now think about ways I can help parents teach and reinforce reading skills at home. I also make sure I have small groups based on Words their Way spelling inventory. The data I collect from my assessments whether formal or informal drive my instruction and help me notice the gaps and holes in my students’ education.

Another participant called herself a reading “diagnostician” who uses assessment tools to identify various students’ needs:

The “Village” project provided me with the experience of being a reading

“diagnostician”...I learned how to look at all aspects of a child’s reading process to determine what exactly the student’s needs are. This experience helped me to realize how complex reading really is. As a teacher, I now have to be a reading diagnostician for each of my 25 students. Although I wish I could give each of my students as much attention as I gave my tutee during the Village Project, my “Village” experience provided me with the foundation to effectively diagnose my all of students’ reading needs.

Five participants explicitly commented on the enhanced confidence they developed in teaching reading. One participant, for example, said:

I feel much more confident in my abilities to teach and use creativity when teaching. The Village has shown me the wide variety of learners there are in our schools today and how each student can benefit from specific teaching styles. It inspires me to research methods to best teach a student. The impact of a lesson can be greatly influenced by the time I spend preparing. The more I know my students, the better teacher I can be, which was evident in tutoring and supervising The Village project.

Similarly, another participant also commented on how the Village Project helped her feel more prepared for her first-year teaching:

I felt much more prepared coming in as a first year teacher having worked with struggling readers. Working in “the Village” gave me very applicable experience towards my own classroom, as the range of levels is certainly present. I think being aware of how much growth can be made in a short amount of time is also highly motivating; working in “the Village” proved that I could make a tangible difference.

Family Involvement

Family involvement is a unique aspect of the Village Project. Parents involved in the Village Project actively participated in the tutoring sessions and interacted frequently with the teacher candidates. Such interactions provided teacher candidates with opportunities to learn more about ways to engage families in reading instruction.

On the follow-up survey, we asked participants about their perceptions of family involvement in terms of the frequency of typical family involvement activities such as communicating with families about school programs and facilitating the involvement of families as volunteers. All participants agreed or strongly agreed that they shared student progress with families (100%). A majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they supported learning at home, shared school programs, and involved families in decision making (>80%). Three-fourths of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they assisted other teachers to better understand families they work with (75%). Half of the participants included families in learning activities (50%). Over one third of the participants involved parents as volunteers (35%), and collaborated with community partners to provide resources (30%) and services for families (35%).

All participants saw the family involvement component as key to the Village Project. When asked about how their experiences with the Village Project impacted their current efforts to build a community of learning, participants reflected the project’s impact on (a) their enhanced awareness of the importance and potential of family involvement in teaching and learning, and (b) their confidence in their skills to communicate with families and involve communities in reading instruction.

In their responses to the open-ended questions, all participants commented on their perception of the value of family involvement as a result of participating in the Village Project. One participant, for example, said “This project [Village Project] showed me the value of bringing everyone together. When you really have a village working together to support literacy, success is a result.” The success of the Village Project also allowed participants to see the potential impact of family involvement on student learning. As one participant summarized: “The Village project helped open my eyes to the positive impact of familial involvement on the student’s grades and more importantly their knowledge and learning.” Such awareness also led to their efforts to involve their local communities in their current teaching settings. As one participant shared:

The community component of “the Village” is huge - it’s so incredible to see the success and growth it has experienced already. I think that being able to see how much more comfortable it is to meet the families away from the schools was inspiring as well - I have conducted several home visits this year, which I don’t know if I would have done had it not been for my immersion in the community.

Another participant reported that while in her teaching context parents were not as involved as she would like to see, she was able to use the Village Project as a reference to encourage more family involvement:

It is a little different here because the parents are not very involved with their children’s schooling. The focus is on grades much more than learning, unfortunately. There are some parents that I have met with and I encourage them to work with their students and I use the Village project as a reference of how much it helps the students if parents are involved.

Similarly, some other participants also reported experiencing challenges in family involvement in their current teaching settings. However, they reported that they are “more optimistic because of the Village project. It helps create a bond between teachers and shows how effective teachers can be if we utilize our resources.” As another participant explained, “It [the Village Project] opened my eyes to the possibilities of community involvement and how important it is for students to understand that they are supported by their parents and teachers together.”

In addition to the awareness of the importance of family involvement and its potential impact on teaching and learning, participants also commented on their enhanced confidence in communicating with families and involving families in reading instruction. The Village experiences have made all participants feel more comfortable in communicating directly with parents:

I feel much more comfortable with parents. The Village Project broke my self-determined stereotype of parents in my mind. I have realized that it is very likely that parents want to help and may just want some direction or ideas. I also have come to realize the endless resources at our disposal. All it takes is initiative, confidence and knowledge.

Participants recognized that “Communicating with parents is key for student learning.” One participant commented, “I now think about ways I can help parents teach and reinforce reading skills at home.” Another participant revealed his/her practice to seek parental support in reading practices:

...the Village Project helped me realize how integral support at home is to a child reader. We were encouraged to incorporate the parents into the lesson. In my classroom now, I try to send home as much material as possible so parents can help their students at home.

Supported by the school to “involve parents and create a community of learning”, another participant reported that:

I communicate weekly and biweekly with parents about standards we are learning in class, and parents always know they are invited to join us in the classroom. Students are constantly asked to include their parents in their learning. (i.e. they are asked to have their parents quiz them, read them their stories, etc.)

Expansion of the Village Project

When asked whether they envisage creating a “village type” learning community in their own practices, 17 out of 20 participants provided responses and all but one stated that they would love to create a “village type” experience for all the students with whom they work. As beginning teachers, especially those who graduated in 2011 and 2012, they recognized that time, resources, administrative support and logistical issues (such as transportation) may make it challenging for them to lead a Village Project in their local setting:

I would love to, depending on the position that I hold within the realm of education. As a school teacher (and a new one at that), I do not feel that I would have the resources for tutors or the appropriate time to conduct such a project. However, I have seen the importance of such a project and would love to re-create even parts of it on a different level if possible.

Even though they may not feel ready to initiate such a project at their schools, some of former tutors reported that they could integrate elements of the Village Project into their classroom instruction:

I try to bring in aspects of the Village into my classroom. I invite parents into my classroom. I think as I become more confident and fluent with the regular on goings and duties of a teacher, I will be able to better include the full-spectrum of the Village utopia.

In addition to replicating the Village Project, several participants also talked about the possibilities of expanding the “village experience” in other content areas beyond reading:

I would like to see the village project move to other content areas. While I understand the value of literacy skills, I have several students who are capable of reading but have trouble with single-digit computations. They would benefit from help in other areas.

Finally, participants also added comments to indicate how proud they are of their association with the Village Project. For example, one participant stated that: “I have seen the Village grow and I am proud of how far it has come. I look forward to hopefully seeing it expand in the years to come.” Similarly, another participant reported that “This program is amazing and the effects that it has on the college students, young students and the parents involved are incredible. I am very proud to be a part of this program and look forward to seeing how far this project goes.”

Discussions and Implications

The findings of this study demonstrated the long-term impact of the Village Project on preservice teachers' application of reading instructional strategies, their use of formative and summative reading assessments, and their motivation and confidence in engaging and involving parents in the teaching and learning efforts in their local contexts. The feedback reported by the participants not only confirmed some of the key factors in preparing teachers for the increasingly diverse student population, but also offered further insights for teachers and teacher educators committed to community-engaged service learning efforts.

First, guided field experiences are critical in teacher preparation programs. While working with struggling readers presented a challenge for preservice teachers, the structure of the Village Project provided scaffolded support and created a unique opportunity where preservice teachers can apply reading theories and assessments in one-to-one teacher-student interactions. In addition to working with students, through the Village Project, preservice teachers also had the opportunity to leverage existing resources from the community library and had direct interactions with parents of struggling readers. These are valuable experiences that may not be made possible if preservice teachers are only provided with field experiences in traditional K-12 school settings. It is through the authentic interactions with communities and families that preservice teachers developed better understanding of families from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and become more intentional in involving families in their own classrooms.

Second, in order for teachers to truly realize their vision for teaching, they need to receive continuous support after graduating from the teacher education program (Fairbanks, et al., 2010). As reported by participants in this study, while first-year teachers would like to continue their involvement in village-type experiences, time, resources, administrative support and logistical issues can become major challenges. Considering the transition first-year teachers face, it would probably not be realistic to expect them to lead and initiate a community-engaged project in their local teaching settings right away. However, continuing to involve first-year teachers in the Village Project through either volunteer work or online collaborative opportunities could sustain their engagement and inspire them to seek school and community resources as they explore ways to initiate their own village-type experiences in local settings. Even though there are former graduates who are currently volunteering with the Village Project, more intentional efforts need to be made to provide support for all graduates from the program to sustain their commitment in community and family engagement given the potential constraints they may face.

Finally, in order to truly prepare preservice teachers for their work with students, families and local communities, offering field experiences in one reading methods course is not enough. It was very encouraging to see the expansion of community-engaged service learning opportunities as a result of the Village Project in our teacher education program. With the growth of the Village Project, increasing numbers of teacher educators are involved in this collaborative effort, and the tutoring content has grown beyond reading to include science and music. More and more we are confirming that it does indeed "take a village" to support our children.

The narratives from teachers about their participation in a service learning course and their continued utilization or desired to utilize the practices they learned provide some indication that service learning courses might, indeed, have carry-over effects long after the participants have exited the course. We would argue the more opportunities preservice

teachers have to work with students and parents the more confidence they gain from those interactions. While teacher education is aware of the importance of parental and family involvement, it is not common in teacher education programs to find parents working side-by-side with preservice teachers. It is also difficult even during field placements to arrange parental interactions with preservice teachers. When there are parental interactions during internships and student teaching they are generally peripheral to instructional practices. As such, the intentional creation of afterschool service learning programs or courses focused on instruction, parents and preservice teachers might be just the direction for teacher education to consider. We would love to partner with other teacher educators who are undertaking similar service learning “village” work. Our hope is to determine how we might more effectively support our students when they become inservice teachers as they try to carry on the patterns of behaviors they learned and developed during their time in service learning courses.

Limitations and Future Research

While it is encouraging to receive the positive feedback and insightful suggestions from graduates from the program who have participated in the Village Project, we do recognize that there are several limitations in this study. These limitations also provide us with directions for future research regarding this project.

First, even though 71% of the contacted graduates responded to the survey, the total number of participants in this study is relatively small. In addition, participants who took the time to respond to the survey may only include those who have had relatively positive experiences with the Village Project and those who are more interested in continuing their efforts with community-based service learning opportunities. We would like to better follow up with all participants from the Village Project in the future, especially those who may indicate struggles or frustrations with such projects while they are in the teacher education program.

Second, without comparable data from a comparison group of preservice teachers, in this study we only reported the perceptions of those who had the opportunity to participate in the Village Project. In order to measure the distinct impact of the Village Project, it would be important for us to expand our study to include those who may not have had the chance to participate in the Village Project and track their growth in the use of reading strategies, their perceptions on family involvement, and their approaches for community engagement as they become inservice teachers. Conducting such longitudinal, comparative studies would help us better identify aspects of the Village Project that may be essential in teacher education programs to support preservice teachers’ growth and can be adapted to support beginning inservice teachers.

Finally, we focused our study on former students’ report about the impact of the Village Project on their development. However, the impact of the project on community partners, students, and parents was not captured. Through systematic evaluation, we plan to engage all stakeholders in future research efforts to gather feedback from all parties involved. Such feedback and insights could offer additional ideas and suggestions to sustain and expand community-based service learning projects like the Village Project.

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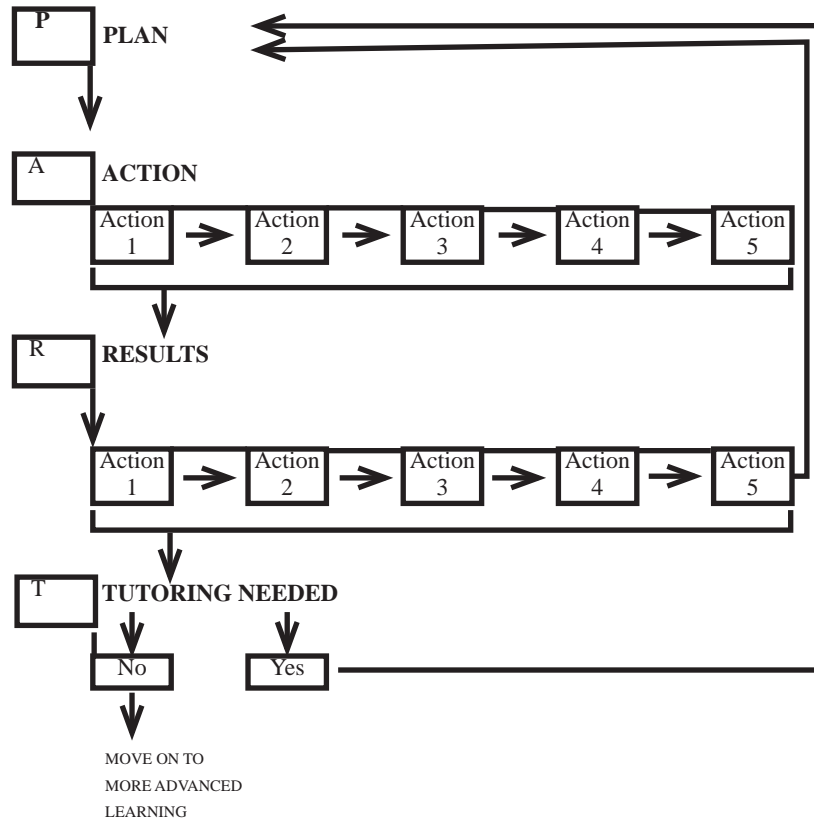
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Appendix A

PART Model



Appendix B

Sample Lesson Plan Using PART Model

What is the PLAN and why?

What is the expected ACTION on the part of parent/student/tutor?

What to do as a RESULT of tutees action/inaction?

Is more TUTORING needed or can we move on?

Plan: This week I will choose five tier two words from the book my tutee and I will read this semester – *A River Runs Wild*, by Lynne Cherry. The words – **pollution, industrial, fertile, restore, invention**. I selected these words because I know from our discussion last week that Justin struggled to decode and read these words, he does not know their meanings and he cannot spell them.

Action: (What we will do together) - Action 1

My tutee, his mother and I will try to guess what we think the words mean before we begin to read the book.

(What my tutee will do alone) – Action 2

As he reads, my tutee will use context clues to try to determine the meaning of the words. He will look at the sentences surrounding the words; he will look to see if the author, Lynne Cherry, gives him any help in figuring out the words.

(What I must do as a result of my tutee's action/inaction) - Action 3

I will ask Justin to explain how he arrived at each word meaning, so I can see how he is thinking about the words as he reads.

(What we will do together- parent/tutor/tutee) -Action 4

After Justin has read the chapter, we will determine if our earlier guesses made sense; we will talk about why our guesses did or did not make sense.

(What parents will do to help at home parent/tutee) – Acton 5

At home, as he reads, Justin will explain to his mother how he tries to make meaning of words he does not understand..

Result: (What we must do together as a result of my tutee's action/inaction) -Result 1

I will ask Justin to explain to his mother and me how he arrived at each word meaning, so we can understand how he is thinking about the words as he reads.

(What my tutee will do alone) Result – 2

Justin will write his explanation for us to read

(What I must do as a result of my tutee's action/inaction) –Result 3

I must determine if Justin's written explanations make sense; I will talk about why his explanations do or do not make sense. If necessary, I will write student-friendly definitions for each word.

(What we will do together –parent/tutor/tutee) -Result 4

Mother and I will alternatively think of questions that will extend Justin's understanding of his new vocabulary. For example, "now that you know what "pollution" means can you come up with two different sentences in which you can use the word pollution?"

(What parents will do to help at home parent/tutee) -Acton 5

Mother will try to provide several opportunities for Justin to use the words we learned in the upcoming week. - Suggestions – opportunities can be: Something they see on TV that connects with the words, can be in general conversation, can be from another reading.

Tutoring:Is there need for more tutoring with this lesson? If not, move on to more reading and vocabulary development.

Appendix C

Follow-Up Survey

It takes a Village: A Collaborative Assault on the Struggling Reader Dilemma

Hello former students of the "Village Project" - *Teaching Struggling Readers*, I hope you are doing well. You were one of the successful students who worked with parents/tutees in the "Village Project" at May Memorial Library. As the project continues to grow I wish to determine its effectiveness post graduation. As such, I am trying to determine if you are/ were able to employ any of the practices from the "Village" in your classroom practice. If not you can tell me that too. As such, I have created a short survey that might help me

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determine the post-graduation effectiveness of this particular endeavor. I want to thank you in advance for taking the survey. It should take no longer than 8 minutes. I will inform you as to the results I find. Thank you again for your help with this. Please keep in touch.

1. I feel confident that I integrate the following reading components as I work with struggling readers

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
phonemic awareness					
phonics					
vocabulary					
fluency					
comprehension					

2. How does the “Village” project impact your reading instruction?
 3. Please rate the frequency of the follow activities you engage in
 (based on Epstein’s model: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/sixtypes.htm>)
 1=never; 2=sometimes; 3=often; 4=usually; 5=always

	1	2	3	4	5
I assist other teachers at the school to better understand families we work with.					
I share with families how they can support learning at home.					
I communicate with families about school programs.					
I communicate with families about school programs and student progress.					
I facilitate the involvement of families as volunteers at my school.					
I include families in learning activities at home through homework, curriculum-based activities.					
I include families in school and classroom decision making.					
I collaborate with community partners to provide resources and services for families and students in the community.					
I collaborate with community partners to provide services for families and students in the community.					

4. How does the “Village” project impact your efforts to involve families?
 5. How do you collaborate with others (teachers, specialists, teaching assistants, administrators, families, students, community members, etc.) as a teacher?
 6. Do you envisage creating a “village type” learning community sometime in your practice? Why or Why not?
 7. What are the supports and barriers to replicating a “village type” learning community in your school?

8. What other comments would you like to share regarding the impact of the “village” project?

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